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Above, Gene Simmons (left) and Paul Stanley.

KISS

Above, Peter Criss (left) and Ace Frehley.

Group's imitators warned it could be kiss of death

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ
of The Gazette

Gene Simmons, the fire-eating, tongue-wagging vampire or rock's top costume act. Kiss, is a contented demon.

He makes millions of dollars being a part of rock music's most blatantly exploitative act, yet he doesn't have to worry about showing his face in public.

"It's wonderful. You have no idea how great it is to walk into a restaurant or stand in line for a movie and not get hassled. You don't have an image to live up to. It keeps your sanity.

"It's great to lead an ordinary life. It's like Lois Lane with Superman — Clark Kent just wasn't very impressive to her."

Success has been handled coolly by the four painted, outrageously costumed members of Kiss — the reptilian Simmons, starry-eyed guitarist Paul Stanley, spaceman guitarist Ace Frehley and feline drummer Peter Criss. The group has just ended a 17-month sabbatical from touring and appears at the Forum Monday night.

They don't see much of each other away from the concert stage or recording studio, and they've invested their money.

They have calculatedly exploited the fantasies of pre-pubescents and teenagers to the point where numerous young people have been seriously burned imitating the group's stage antics which include fire-eating and flying. It doesn't bother Simmons much.

'People's band'

"Let's face it," he reasons, "Kiss doesn't mean a hell of a lot. It's like a church revival or the circus. You could condemn all superheroes because they make people feel they can do superhuman things.

"But I think most people see the group as it is — an act that provides a few thrills. There is always a danger that something could happen to us on stage — I've been burned twice — but it's the same chance taken by the tightrope walker or the race driver."

The act is so carefully calculated to the point where it has induced hundreds of thousands of young people to shell out five dollars to be a member of the Kiss Army Fan Club, named after a band of Terre Haute, Ind., kids who marched on a radio station that wouldn't play the band's discs.

"We're a people's band," crows Simmons. "Radio never supported us in the beginning. If our success was based on what the critics said, we would never have made it.

"Some people think we're just four bozos who walked in off the street. Well, we did walk off the street, but we masterminded our own success."

Kiss' success is certified by the Gallup poll organization, which has proclaimed it the most popular rock band in America for the past three years. Each of its 15 albums, put out over the past five years (including four critically lambasted solo efforts last year) has sold at least a million copies.

But that's just the tip of the iceberg. Kiss is the rock industry's prime marketing success. The group's flashy image has been regurgitated in a comic book, a television special and now a movie, *Kiss and the Attack of the Phantoms*.

Not only do official Kiss posters sell in the millions — not counting the ones that come with the extravagant album packages — but costume and make-up kits are also doing a brisk business.

They appeal to those who are barely out of watching television kiddie cartoon shows. The kids spend their allowances on Kiss merchandise, just like the paraplegic 11-year-old Curtis Daniels stashed in his room in Olympia, Washington.

Last year he burned himself badly when he took a fireplace brush, tied a sock around the end, soaked it with gasoline and ignited it as a torch. Curtis then filled his mouth with gas, but the plan to spew flames like Gene Simmons bombed when the flame engulfed his mouth and chest.

His father filed a suit earlier this year, stating: "Kiss is evil. It extols cannibalism, eerie sexism, sadism, aims its filth at the youth of America and specifically contributes to the delinquency of minors in a tortuous manner."

Similar words have described numerous rock 'n' roll acts over the years, but Kiss does make Alice Cooper appear pale by comparison.

It's business as usual for Simmons, who likens the act to a circus: "No one says a tightrope walker inspires people to walk on ledges."

He's looking forward to going back on the road. "We took a rest so we could come back again. I want to be the King Kong of rock — the band everyone knows and that no one can avoid."

The band's aims are aided and abetted by a shrewd New York management outfit and Casablanca Records, the company that's launched Donna Summer and the comic book disco images of The Village People.

The company had the audacity to release solo records by the individual members of the band, the album covers combining into a rather poor excuse for a Kiss "mural." Naturally, kids had to buy all four records to get the mural. All four albums have sold over one million copies each.

'Few surprises'

Out comes the carney-style hype for the new record, entitled *Dynasty*: "And rock and roll shall stand on a windswept plateau at the edge of the 1970s readying a descent into the virgin valley of the new decade . . . It is written that the Demon, the Caiman, the Starman and the Spaceman shall marshall the forces of Rock and Roll, and they shall spearhead the crusade to conquer the 80s while all the armies of Hell joyously shout the words of victory: LONG LIVE THE DYNASTY."

Not to mention, long live the Kiss T-shirts, posters, publications, and special fan club kits sold at their concerts.

"Every day," muses Simmons, "is just one more day that I'm having a ball doing what I do. I'm not known for my modesty, but let me tell you; our concert at the Forum will be the most brilliant rock show anyone will ever see.

"I fly. Paul shoots out a laser beam from his eye to the back of the hall. Ace's guitar beams a laser that causes things to explode. The drums will be elevated to 30 feet and make a 360-degree turn. There'll also be a few surprises falling from the ceiling."

The group's thundering sound will blast from speaker boxes hanging over the large 60-foot stage, thus guaranteeing the audience an unobstructed view of Kiss' mayhem. Over $1.5 million worth of equipment is being poured into the spectacle, which is likely to remain on the road in various parts of the globe for nearly a year.

One thing members of Kiss still manage to do themselves — besides plug in and crank out rudimentary rock — is their own make-up. "It takes us about an hour. We never had any technical training at make-up, so we still basically don't know what the hell we're doing."

And Gene Simmons and cohorts are laughing all the way to the bank — unrecognized.

Juan Rodriguez

The epitome of cheapo film pastiche -a Kiss miss

KISS is ATTACK OF THE PHANTOMS
Cinema de Paris

Hanna-Barbera production directed by Gordon Hessler; screenplay by Jan-Michael Sherman and Don Buday; stunt coordinator Buddy Joe Hooker; starring Paul Stanley, Gene Simmons, Peter Criss, Ace Frehley, co-starring Anthony Zerbe and Deborah Ryan; 95 minutes.

You'd never know that Kiss' latest roadshow costs $1.5 million to mount from watching the painted rock group's first feature film.

This is the epitome of cheapo-cheapo movie pastiche, in which the basics of film-making are done poorly and on a tight budget.

Even the clutch of young fans mostly 10-year-old boys, at the film's opening yesterday booed when the fleeting clips of Kiss in concert gave way to the abysmal "plot" sequences.

In a nutshell: An amusement park operator (Anthony Zerbe) is fired and goes crazy, determined to make as many members of the Kiss "Army" into robot-like clones. There's also a desperate young bud, Deborah Ryan, looking for her snatched-up boyfriend. The whole thing grinds forth slowly until the clones of Kiss break out of the secret laboratory . . . and so it goes.

Although Kiss claims it is a band of the people, they say nothing about their fans or their world. They walk through their roles in the zombie-style pioneered by Peter Frampton and the Bee Gees in last year's *Sgt.Pepper fiasco*. The big screen seems to diminish the quartet's smokey concert stage presence, they wind up with less expression than puppets.

Technical deficiencies

Then there are the rank technical deficiencies: poor lip syncing, uneven sound, fuzzy focusing, meaningless bits of montage. The awkward attempts at acting by the cast of unknowns were not helped by the script, which was sparsely dotted with such fillets of condescension as "They're just high-spirited kids, that's all."

The members of the audience shuffled restlessly at such dreariness and cheered whenever Kiss performed a half dozen or so hit songs.

The group made no attempt to do anything special — even Gene Simmons' firebreathing antics were less convincing than the technical effects of a hokey B-grade science-fiction flick. They merely walked through what passes for a movie only because it's on celluloid.

It's easier to reap profits with minimal budgets than spend money trying to make Kiss more than the cheap trick it is.

Juan Rodriguez

Almond returns to do 'The Burning Book'

By JOHN FITZGERALD
of The Gazette

Less than a decade ago, they were being touted as Canada's leading movie couple, he the brilliant young director whose work was mulled over earnestly in college seminar classes and she, his wife-star, the bus driver's daughter who the world would come to know and remember as the ill-fated Anne Boleyn.

And then, for a thousand different reasons, it was over.

Genevieve Bujold went on to regard the world from the woody perches of Malibu and he, Paul Almond, went off to the deserts of Morocco to consider all that had gone before.

He dabbled in Zen, Yoga and matters spiritual, travelled the Middle East and Europe and remarried. And after hailed, *Act of the Heart* and *Journey*, it would be seven years before Almond would do his next film. That time has finally come. In September, Almond will direct Richard Harris, Christopher Plummer and David Warner in *The Burning Book*, a $7-million period piece set in 16th century Europe and concerning William Tyndale, the man who mass-produced the first English translation of the Bible, until then only in Latin. It's to be shot over a 10-week period on locations in Montreal, Sorel and England.

"I still have a lot of things to say and I think the difference is that today I say them a lot simpler," Almond told a visitor this week as afternoon sun beat upon his mad professor's hairdo and he tried to beat the heat with sips of strong coffee. Around him while he talked, several of Almond's proteges busied themselves with repairs to the Westmount home in which he has lived for many years, a place which looks like its occupant has been away long and often and has allowed it to fall into dignified disrepair.

Seated near a stone lion in his garden, Almond, whose boyish grin belies his 47 years and three marriages, pronounced himself satisfied with making a film of *The Burning Book*.

"There are always certain patterns to costumes pictures, certain styles and what I want to do is cut across them, give the picture a contemporary treatment. It's a story with a lot of chase, adventure and excitement and all three of the lead actors have had classical training. Richard Harris looks like he was born to wear priest robes."

Produced by Silverscreen International Inc. and with a screenplay by Ric Hardman, the film concerns Tyndale's efforts to make the Bible available to the English masses in their own language. The Church Establishment, spearheaded by Sir Thomas More, feared what effects this might have and hired an agent to hunt Tyndale down but aided by the Reformers, he fled to Holland.

Almond says he needed a break in the early 1970s to sort things out. "One thing I'm glad I didn't do was go back into television after 15 years of directing in that medium. I guess you never really know where you're at. I look back now on films like *Isabel* and *Act of the Heart* and I'm surprised they have stood up.

"I lived through that time with Genevieve when we too were really on the crest of a wave and I wouldn't have traded it for anything in the world. The autographs, the publicity.

"Genevieve is a phenomenon which Quebec had never seen before and probably never will again. Here was a girl from the eastend of Montreal who went out and married a WASP and we became like the magic couple.

"I remember when *Act of the Heart* opened, we were driven by motorcade from the premiere in English across town to the premiere in French. That kind of thing won't happen again."

Almond worked on co-productions in Europe, did a one-hour television film for the CBC and has spent the past several years laying the groundwork for his "impossible dream," the establishment of a motion picture company with permanent long-term financing.

"I think motion pictures all the toughest of all the crafts because you have to deal with vision and artistry and contend with all the hassles on the business level. People come and go a lot in our industry and I guess it's very hard to have humility when you are a name in a place like Hollywood. I remember once being cursed with the illusion that I had the world by the tale but that was very brief. I realized I didn't want that kind of acclaim and I can truthfully say I'm totally happy with what I am and where I've been. I've always been attractive to the more primitive life."

Almond's son by Genevieve spends most of the time with his mother and his new wife Joan has several of her own.

"It's unbelievable how much time fathering takes if you want to do it right. But life can be often beautiful. I don't subscribe to the whole suffering school of art, that you have to be pained in order to create. One should suffer as little as possible. I've been married three times and lived with several women over a long period of time. I've never been one of those quick-cycle-in-the-bay type of people. And I've been lucky.

"My detractors might say that I haven't been able to make it according to their standards. But I don't think so. What I'm interested in is being a damn good director and right now with this film, that means all hands to the pump."

PAUL ALMOND
Directing 'The Burning Book'

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